



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

Evaluating Teaching and Research in University systems. A Public Policy Approach: *Food for thought*

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Evaluation and Assessment in HE: what are they for? (1)

From the institutional/academic side

- Knowing what we are, what we are doing and how we are doing it
- Learning how to improve
- Making others understanding us

From the Governmental side

- Monitoring
- Addressing/steering (better performance)
- Making accountable



Evaluation and Assessment in HE: what are they for? (2)

- Money/funding should be not the pillar of Evaluation/assessment, not the final end, otherwise E/A undergo a deep distortion of their ends
- Money/Funding should be only one of the dimensions of E/A processes and should add value (not be the 'Value')



Quality ASSURANCE:

Basic problems: Defining Quality

- *Quality assurance is all those planned and systematic activities to provide adequate confidence that a product or service will satisfy given requirements for quality (HEQC, 1994)*
- *Quality assurance is the systematic review of educational programs to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained (UNESCO)*
- *Assurance of quality in higher education is a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, process and outcomes) fulfils expectations or measures up to threshold minimum requirements (INQAAHE)*
- *Quality assurance can be seen, on the one hand, as a policy instrument supporting transparent markets for students and graduates **by making information about quality differences public**, and, on the other hand, as a **safeguard against too blunt minimizing of quality levels in the free supply behavior of higher education providers on (quasi-) markets** [Westerheijden, 2007. P. 12]*



Quality ASSURANCE: Basic problems: WHAT IS?

- Different perspectives of quality according the different stakeholders (students, teachers, employers, public opinion).
 - Quality is excellence
 - Quality is perfection (zero default)
 - Quality is “fitness for purpose”
 - Quality is “value for money”
 - Quality is transformation/continuous improvement



Quality Assurance FOR WHAT? (1)

for **Better PERFORMANCE** on:

- the production of new knowledge and capacity for innovation;
- student learning outcomes
- the educational or learning gain in both declarative knowledge and more diffuse ‘soft skills’
- student performance, retention, graduation and employability
- support for student success
- *the production of suitably trained and socio-demographically representative graduates at different educational levels*
- the breadth and depth of the curriculum and its responsiveness to contemporary needs
- pedagogical methods, training and academic support and development
- *links to societal practice and working life, including graduates’ preparedness as citizens and lifelong learners*



Quality Assurance

FOR WHAT? (2)

- For better **Accountability** to the students, the stakeholders, but, all in all, to the Community/Society

- For increasing the Governmental capacity to address the institutional behaviour of universities



The rethoric Of QA

- The focus on learning outcomes intended as standards is substantially a mess and does not help assuring academic standards (see, for example) the *Dublin Descriptors* (learning outcomes should be substantial and contextualized)
- The focus on the process risks to be misleading
- Unsustainability of courses assessment (labor intensive, financially expensive)

**Finding perfect, valid and certain measures
for academic added value is a HOLY
GRAAL**



Choices to be done (1)

- «Fitness for purpose» vs. «minimum standards»?
- Quality of process vs. Quality results
- How many indicators?
- Indicators should take into account the different structural inputs (*the differentiation of the background of students, the socio-economic context, etc..*)
- Paying attention to the perceived meaning of indicators
- The problem of institutional opportunism



Choices do be done (2)

- Which informations? Do they make the difference? Rankings (research based) against Multi-ranking (different dimensions)
- Soft instruments like institutional audit together with some targeted specialized financial incentives capable to help institutions to be what they can be. Thus designing quality to for ‘imposing’ **profiling**
- Provision of public informations capable to reach all the potential targets
- Governmental multi-ranking?
- Mixing self-evaluation and external evaluation in a proper way
- **Quality Assurance as a tool to prize diversification of institutional missions**



Evaluating Research (1)

- Lack of widely acknowledged quality standards for research practice is somewhat surprising
- Even here what makes the difference from a policy perspective is WHY research is evaluated, WHAT is evaluated and HOW



Evaluating Research (2)

WHY?

- **Accountability** (value for money? Value for the society? value for the long term?)
- **Performance** in terms of:
 - Internationalization
 - Third mission
- **Funding** (prizing the past)
- **To push Originality and Innovation** (banking on the future)



Evaluating Researchn (2)

WHAT

Context/tools of evaluation:

- Research grant applications
- research manuscripts and publications
- specific research topics
- research groups and constellations
- Institutions
- national systems for producing science and innovation



Evaluating Research (2)

HOW

Most Frequent adopted measures of evaluation of research

- Publication measures (e.g. number, quality and impact)
- Number and quality (academic degrees) of the researchers themselves
- Size of national and international scientific networks
- Amount and number of external research grants received
- Amount and number of intra-organizational grants
- Number of PhD theses produced
- Number of postdoctoral or guest researchers

**Conflict between
Quality and Quantity**



Conflicting Rethorics and Proverbs on ER

- *Peer Review is better* vs. *Bibliometrics is more objective and efficient*
- *High Competitive Evaluation is driver of higher quality* vs *HCE is driver only of increased quantity of research outputs*
- *Money makes the difference* vs *Evaluation makes the difference*
- *Thanks to National Research Framework university systems can learn and improve* vs *NRFs simply helps to institutionalize the actual situation*
- *Competition for Funding* vs *Competition for the Results*



Institutional Systemic DESIGN MATTERS

- Only few HEs have university sub-systems really homogeneous. If they are homogeneous (that means that there is not real difference between single institutions) ER can be based on common standards and indicators and, all in all, E/A are intrinsically simple to do
- If the university system is already stratified and /or based on a significant mix of Public/Private, ER should be capable to consider these differences in a proper way (for example: Socio-economic differences of the context; asymmetric accountability between public and private universities)

Different Championships.....



Strategies of ER

- Institutions can be assessed through quantitative methods; individual through peer review or more qualitative indicators
- High percentage of public funding assigned through ER should be avoided if there is not a multidimensional framework of assessment (prizing in the proper way the different dimensions)
- Performance contracts could be a promising way to really connect E/A and funding



And here again and always are

- All in all, the effort of evaluators/assessors is always the same, and *Leo Tolstoj* already got this:

«What is important in knowledge is not quantity, but quality. It is important to know what is significant, what is less so, and what is trivial»





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